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Japanese Military Growing Despite Political Limits

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KAMIFURANO MILITARY RESERVE, Japan—On a cloudy Tuesday afternoon, seven T74 battle tanks designed and built by the Mitsubishi group are on maneuvers in this wooded training ground on Japan's Hokkaido Island. Their crews are getting some rare practice with live ammunition.

One by one, the tanks roll to a firing line. With aim sharpened by laser devices on their turrets, they lob high-explosive shells at wood and iron plates 1,500 yards away. Many land square on target. As the smoke dissipates, each shot is rated by gunnery instructors who observe with the attention of a quality-control team on a Japanese factory floor.

Forty years after its surrender ended World War II, Japan again has modern, disciplined armed forces at its command. They have never been tested in battle. But like this tank unit, their preparation shows the devotion to duty and detail that has served Japanese industry so well.

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The United States is itself responsible for a good deal of today's state of affairs. After the surrender of 1945, U.S. occupation troops dissolved the defeated Imperial Forces and sent 7 million Japanese soldiers home. Americans drafted a new constitution, in which Japan renounced war and pledged that land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.

But when war erupted in neighboring Korea in 1950, U.S. strategists shifted gears and concluded that a rearmed Japan was crucial to regional stability. Imperial Forces veterans were called back into uniform, and three services were founded in 1954 after the U.S. occupation ended.

They were christened the Ground, Air and Maritime Self-Defense Forces, to support the fiction that all was in accord with the constitution. Many terms of the imperial military lexicon, including names for rank, were purged and replaced with less martial sounding ones.

Substantive restrictions were built in, too, in deference to fears of a recurring militarism and loss of civilian control. To this day, Japan has no military courts and no draft. It has no marine corps because it is thought that marines are for inva-

sions, or centralized military intelligence agency. Defense gets only an agency in the national government, not a full ministry.

The atom bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki also have left a special imprint on military policy. Japan has pledged never to acquire nuclear weapons, although it accepts protection under the U.S. "nuclear umbrella." Nor is it preparing its troops in any systematic fashion to fight on radiation-contaminated battlefields.

The Army is the largest service, with 155,000 members and about 40 percent of the total defense budget. But it is the least modernized of the three. The Air Force flies U.S.-designed F104, F4 and F15 interceptors, as well as Japanese-developed F1 fighters. The Navy's vessels are small and oriented toward antisubmarine warfare and coastal defense. The Navy also has 14 submarines.

The official mission of the armed forces is deterrence of aggression from any quarter. But "enemy" in Japan normally means the Soviet Union, which is seen as pursuing a menacing buildup. Moscow is said to have expanded its Pacific fleet to 825 ships in recent years and to have put in Siberia 135 SS20 nuclear-tipped, multiple-warhead missiles, many believed to be targeted on Japan.

Japanese troops are deployed accordingly. Army firepower is concentrated in Hokkaido, which lies only a few miles from the Soviets' Sakhalin Island and a chain of islands claimed by the Japanese, where the Soviets are reported to have stationed 10,000 troops and 40 MiG23 jets.

Japanese F15s scramble about three times a day to meet unidentified aircraft, often Soviet, approaching Japanese airspace. Japanese intelligence units monitor Soviet communications. It was they who recorded a Soviet fighter pilot's radio message in 1983 that he had just shot down a Korean Air Lines jumbo jet. The Japanese Navy tracks Soviet submarines with seabed sensors and U.S. P3C Orion patrol planes.

War scenarios generally have Americans fighting alongside Japanese. U.S. units would hit the Soviet mainland. The Japanese would defend the rear and with mines, submarines and air power close straits into the Sea of Japan to bottle up the Soviet Pacific fleet, which is headquartered inside at Vladivostok.

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